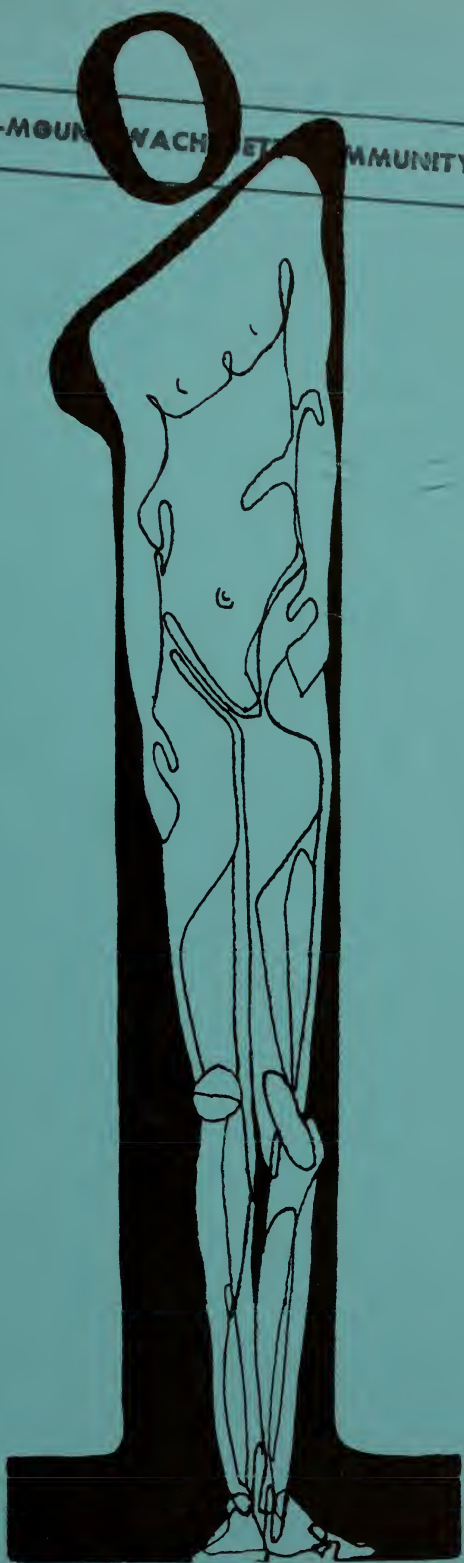


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a magazine of poetry & prose

a magazine of poetry & prose

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Turn my eyes in backwards
the whites open
blank page
perfect poem

JIRO AND I

Jiro's sweater smells like California
Wheat color of the parched sun
Fresh juice of grapefruit
Friendly as coconut palm leaves
Green color of wind
The smell of burning leaves and Jiro's sweat
I am always close to Jiro.

AFFECTION

A cloud caresses my body
softly

Warm grey engulfs my self
totally

My eyes touch your eyes
deeply

I tremble
solicitously

As you kiss my lips
I swallow my heart.

FRAGMENT

A splintered, warping bench
monitors the winter-deserted beach,
as from the bay-head
tight icy white caps skim shoreward
to spread thinly along the strand.

A circlet of stone and shell
polished by encounter of sea and sand
entrap a passing froth of spindrift,
a tattered ribbon of kelp.
Lone seagull paces the thin grey sky
and cries a bitter protest
to the empty shore.

MOST PEOPLE AND OTHERS

Most people are made of chameleon per-
sonalities

With sunglasses over their souls
They sit in semi-comfortable chairs
and pretend.

They tinge life with coarse sophistication
and manage to fit "God and hell" into one
sentence

Casually.

Their hearts are encased in crush-proof boxes
While they cry onion-peel tears
over coffee

Thank God for a human being
who can tell a star from a pebble.

Leaves valiantly proclaiming their existence
Polished in the sun to a burnt orange
Vermillion splattered courageously —
Shouting brightness to a pastel-blue sky.

And then they die.
crumpling like tattered brown paper
falling down to snowflakes
and frostbitten eyes.
Brightness consumed by white sky and earth.
Till even the remnants of life are buried
Six feet under.

Time stretches itself slowly —
and the white has been here such an infinity
It is grey - black,
only shoveled sidewalks are not encompassed
by its long haggard hand.

This is not death . . . only a long sickness
Till life pushed itself gently
Into each snowflake
Melting it with the warmth of BEING
Forcing it to surrender its coolness
So that life is reborn

And last year's happiness
Need not be remembered —
only continued.

And when you leave
I'll feel a pain
The mask of loneliness
Will once again
Fill my heart
And eyes with tears
But to know you'll return
Will end my fears.
There will be love
Amongst this sorrow
A feel so strong
Enough to wallow
In thoughts of you.

And when you left
I felt this pain
Entangled in my body
Was loneliness once again.

EVENING PLAYGROUND

A concrete court,
cold from the misty breath
of evening air.

Wilting mesh
dangling from
solemn silver stems,
withholding rhythms
of the sun-filled day.

Rows of blunt red boards
hang heavily
from strings of steel,
aroused by the slight push
of a gust of wind.

Steel bars
a web-work of
patterns and routes.

A deserted skeleton
seeking a lively spirit
to fill a hollow gap.

A rigid plank
paralyzed diagonally,
enduring the torment
of unequal position.

Divided -
up high, down low -
Awaiting release,
and a return to
equality and balance.

A crisp brown leaf
floats over a
frozen fence
scratching cement
as the night moves on.



The tall often make
Their physiques a character
Trait: they condescend.

William Welsh

Do those who insist
On organic fare endeavor
To think as well?

William Welsh

Raindrops on windows
Wistful little boys and girls
Stare at unused swings.

Albert Young

Creep down from the hill,
Bring your silver mantle too
Leave it all green.

Dennis Killay

High on a river bank
Looking at the clear blue sky,
Look in the river.

Jim Lloyd

Miscegenation
And interracial adoption
Force some to grad school.

William Welsh

MURDERER'S ROW

by F. R. Scott

A blonde boy of twelve sat comfortably in a stubby apple tree eating a donut and staring blindly into a blue bound book. Beneath the tree mushy earth yielded to the spring sun as small mounds of snow glistened with perspiration. The hill on which the tree stood was spotted with clumps of snow together with a light colored mud that flowed gently down the slope like lava from a volcano. The boy sat on a limb with his back supported by the thin trunk of the tree, not yet blossomed with the flowers that would bear fruit.

As the boy read from his blue book he would occasionally stop, close his eyes and try to remember what he had just read, then looking at the book again would check to see if he had remembered. The book was called *The Baltimore Catechism* and as a student at St. Mary's Grammar School, it was Jonathan's job to memorize his catechism questions. He would peer into the page and read the italicized words.

"Who is God?"

Then closing the book would recite from memory, "God is the Creator of all things."

The apple tree, donut, and old blue book were a kind of daily ritual which enabled the boy to be alone, enjoy his noontime donut and satisfy Sister Maria's obsession about his catechism questions. He could almost hear her voice saying:

"Well Jonathan, the class is waiting, Who is God?"

When the boy's teacher called his name he would shiver and feel like apologizing because his name was Jonathan. He would turn red and feel very embarrassed at the thought of standing up in the classroom and talking about God.

In the distance church bells rung with the effect of an alarm clock. J. D., as the boy preferred to be called, knew that it was 12:30 and time to head back to school. As he jumped from the tree he thought about God and wondered if he watched him in the apple tree. Running down the hill through the mud J. D. could feel the summer coming and wondered if Willie Mays, the great number 24, would have another big season.

"Oh, that sweet-swinging black man," he said loudly while taking imaginary swipes at Sandy Koufax's curve ball. "C'mon Sandy, I'm big Willie, big 24, try and get one by me."

Bang went his wrists as he watched the ball fly over the left field wall.

"I'm god-damn Willie Mays, that's who I am."

J. D. thought about God and surmised that if God played baseball he would unquestionably wear number 24.

On school days J. D.'s usual noonhours were spent in this manner with the exception of the closing weeks of school. During these weeks the apple tree began showing signs of life as did all other trees on the hill. When the leaves started to appear on the trees J. D. could no longer enjoy the solitude he felt when he was in the midsts of winter ravaged hillside. On these occasions he would sit on the roof of a gigantic icehouse, not far from the hill, where his vision was clear and nothing could be hidden by leaves. Although the blue book and donut were still present, the ice-house was a rather poor substitute for J. D.'s tree. There was something about that bare tree that seemed to understand the need for significance where the ice-house never once grunted or swayed under the weight of J. D.'s body.

On his return to school after his tree ritual J. D. jogged slowly toward a crest where four paved roads would unite. On this crest stood, as he liked to call them, the fearsome foursome. They were four huge red-brick structures and were, in J. D.'s mind, much like the front line of a football team and, he supposed, rather related to the murderer's row of Gehrig, Ruth, Dickey and Lazarri that his father always spoke of when he talked about the Yankee dynasty. In actuality these four frightful buildings were St. Mary's Church, Rectory, School and Convent. Although these buildings were quite plain in their red-bricked construction they were garishly obscene to J. D.

"They always made people do embarrassing things like make the sign-of-the-cross each time you passed," he would relate to his protestant friends.

Four years before J. D. had invented a game that he played each day while passing the fearsome foursome. He would see if he could get by all of these buildings without making the sign of the cross. Once he had gotten all the way to the convent when he was nabbed by a priest who had caught him from the Rectory window. Another time, while on his way home in patrols, he was caught by his patrol-leader and stared into making the sign. After the last time he had given up for a while because his patrol-leader had told his teacher and he had to go out and stand by the church making the sign of the cross for the whole recess period that day.

Today, though, J. D. felt like he could make it. He knew his catechism questions and felt like it was his day to emerge victorious. As he approached the Church he was a pitcher pitching to murderer's row. He strutted quickly with his head down looking at the sidewalk. He didn't look up at the cross because he would feel guilty. As he passed the peak of the roof on which the cross stood J. D. started to smile and glanced sideways at the Rectory. Just as he glanced, the door of the Rectory opened and he was startled by a loud shout.

"Young man, where are you going?"

J. D. turned in the direction of the Rectory and said, "I'm going to school, Father."

"Don't you honor God when you pass his house," asked the priest.

J. D. stammered but managed to say, "Yes Father, I'm sorry - I must have forgotten," and with those words he looked up at the Church and made the sign-of-the-cross .

The priest continued to expound, "You know young man that St. Peter denied God three times?"

"Yes Father," replied J. D., "We studied that in class."

"Good," acknowledged the priest, 'then you must also know that Jesus forgave him."

"Yes Father, I guess he must be a pretty good guy."

At this the priest laughed heartily and said "Yes, I guess he must be."

Although quite disappointed because he had been defeated by the buildings, J. D. didn't feel too bad. He was happy that the priest hadn't made a big deal out of it. Anyway he wouldn't have to spend recess at the church again. The priest went back into the Rectory and and J. D. ran quickly into the schoolyard where he played basketball until he heard the sound of the school bell signaling one o'clock and the beginning of noon classes.

As dogs respond to whistles and sheep are herded by dogs, so too are children pried pipered into schools by the ring of a bell. When the bell clanged, caressing the spring air, J. D. along with his classmates ran hurriedly to a formation which centered itself in front of their teacher, Sister Maria. They mulled in a herd momentarily but soon all was quiet and four perfect rows of boy and girls stood awaiting the word to walk. J. D. laughed at the thought of being in an airplane over the schoolyard when the bell rang. He tried to visualize all the boys in their uniforms of blue shirts, blue pants, and blue ties and the girls in blue jumpers and white blouses scampering from all directions to unite in those ridiculously perfect columns.

Presently the children began marching. As they crossed the street the four columns gave a sort of eyes right and made the sign of the cross in reverence to God's House; then the Rectory, then the Convent, and finally one last time as they approached the doors of the school. Rhythmically climbing three flights of stairs the body at last broke ranks and began hanging coats on numbered hooks; then entering the classroom took their respective seats.

The teacher entered the room and while walking to her desk said, "All books off the desks, while we take our oral Catechism quiz."

There was a brief rustle which gave way to complete silence. The teacher spoke in a clear voice, "Robin McQuinn, why is God all-knowing?" Robin stood up and recited perfectly from memory the answer given in the blue book.

"Very good Robin," said the teacher. "Jonathan Ramsey, who is God?"

J. D. stood quickly and started to speak but just couldn't remember the answer. He closed his eyes trying to think. Finally he said "Ah, Ah, I'm sorry Sister I forgot. I studied at noontime but I forgot." The class started to buzz with laughter as J. D. stood silently fingering his desk.

"That is enough class," shouted the teacher. Then facing J. D. said, "Jonathan do you enjoy being laughed at?"

"No Sister," replied J. D., "But I just can't remember."

"Well go and stand in the hallway and see if that will refresh your memory."

J. D. shook his head and walked out of the class closing the door behind him. As he stood in the hallway he tried to remember. He wished he had his blue book to look at. He even put his ear to the door to see if the teacher would ask the same question of somebody else, but, much to J. D.'s disgust, she didn't. He walked through the glass doors to the water fountain, got a drink, then returned to the door and waited.

Finally after what seemed like an hour the door opened and Phillip Ward peeked out and said, "Sister says ya can come back in J. D."

J. D. walked into the class and headed for his seat. He had taken only a few steps when he stopped at the sound of his name.

"Well, Jonathan, we are all waiting." "Who is God?"

The boy pondered the question momentarily and then said, "I can't remember."

"Do you think God enjoys your not being able to say who He is?"

"No Sister, I know who He is but it's just that I can't remember exactly."

The room filled with laughter and the teacher shouted, "Well tell the class who He is not exactly."

J. D. contemplated the situation and then said, "Well, He's Willie Mays."

The class was now roaring with laughter. "Stop this nonsense," barked the teacher.

J. D., his voice now a yell, "Well He is, He's Willie Mays, He's number twenty-four, He knows all about the apple tree, He —

"Stop," shrieked Sister Maria, "Get out of this classroom immediately and report to Sister Superior's office."

The boy ran out of the room and down the stairs, the laughter still ringing in his ears. Out the door, past the Convent, past the Rectory and running hard past the Church.

"I did it," he mumbled, not losing a stride, "I beat the fearsome foursome, I beat them all, a no-hitter."

He ran all the way home, which was nearly a mile, without stopping. When he reached his house he was out of breath and his eyes were welled with tears. Once in the house he headed for the attic and locked himself in. His mother ran up the stairs and banged on the door.

"J. D. what on earth is wrong with you — you come out of there right this instant. Have you been fighting again?"

"I'm never going back to that lousy school again."

"Jonathan David Ramsey, if you aren't out of that attic in five minutes I'm going to call your father at work." "Do you hear me?"

"When ya call him, tell him I beat murderers row."

SUMMER IN NEWARK

The crowds, the aimless milling in the street,
Black faces streaming in the angry heat;
The city summer fills the tenement,
My pores are clogged with ghetto discontent.

An arching bottle strikes a distant wall,
Its sun-shot fragments splatter over all,
Are followed by a stick, a brick, a shout,
The crowd's a mob, at last the dragon's out!

It roams the streets with fire in its teeth,
Crushing those who cannot flee beneath,
And writhes its sinister tail thru homes and stores,
Beating, smashing, crashing locks and doors.

The bullets hit so hard; I didn't know
My blood was such an endless flow,
It steams on the cement in mid-July;
Oh, Momma! Christ! I'm still too young to die!

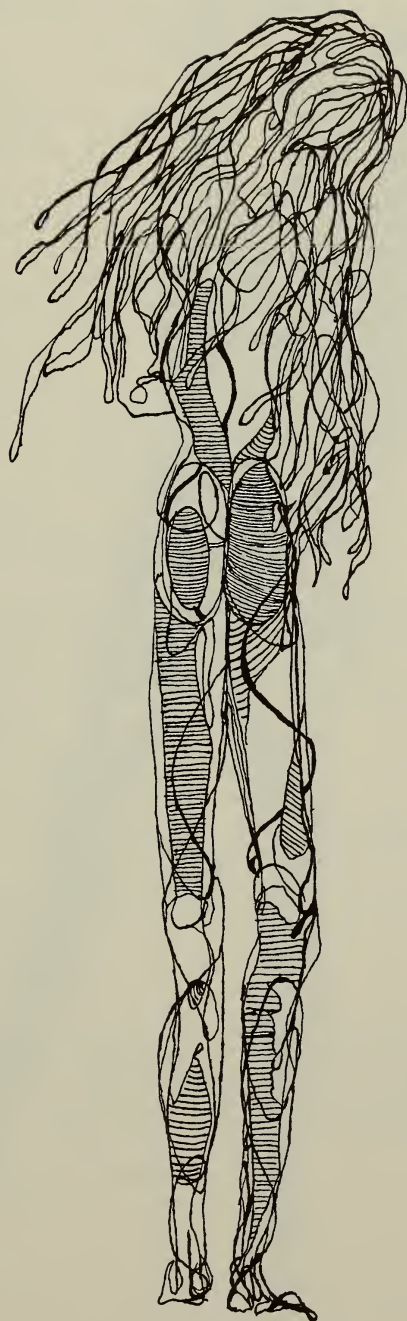
THE FUNERAL DAY

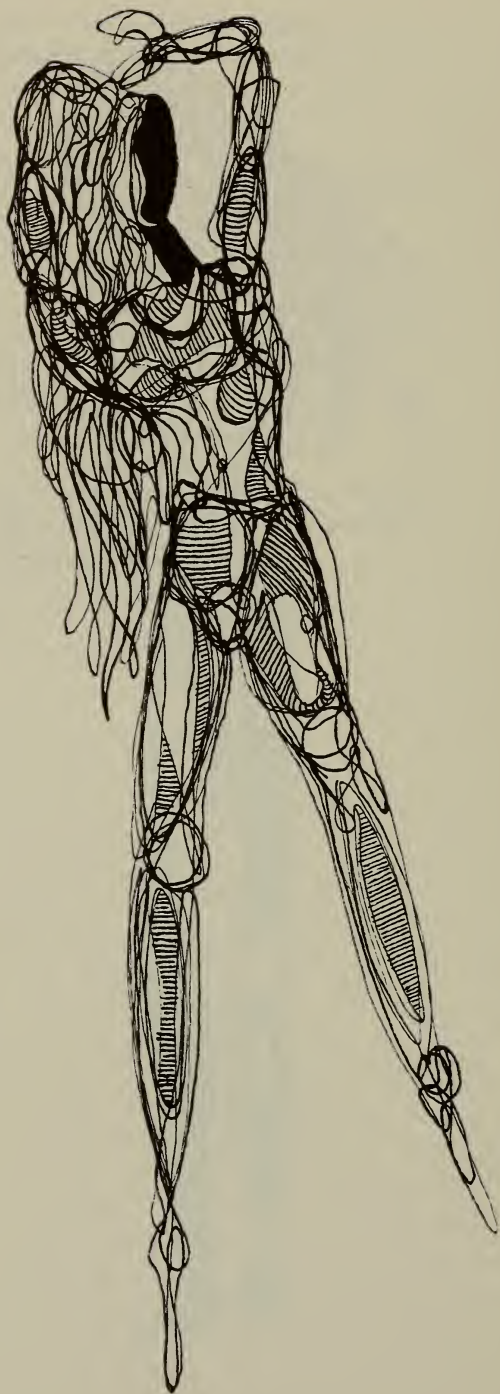
This morning I awoke to rain,
Tapping, dripping, down the pane,
The bitter tears of rain . . .
Of early April.

The morning sky was battleship gray,
And though the sea is far away,
I know it feels the touch . . .
Of early April.

Rain lashed the rough and naked ground,
Melted the dirty snow it found,
Washed Winter off the face . . .
Of early April.

Tomorrow's sun is the birth of Spring,
Today the Winter feels Death's sting,
Its grave is filled with tears . . .
Of early April.





SCULPTRESS

How I studied you that afternoon
 hoping that someday you would work your
 soft fingers over my body
 that I too, might become some living
 prince
 mighty and pure
 without armor

You were charming and so lovely
 sipping tea in the garden and pretending
 to appreciate the roses that
 crept up the trellis behind me as you
 played
 "BACH" type pieces
 on piano

You took me in the house to the parlor
 your eyes shining wildly as you began
 freshening my drink
 as you crossed your arms beneath your
 breasts
 which tightened as
 you laughed

I anticipated FRAUD! and remembered the
 imaginary play I had performed in the
 garden as I overturned the
 table and tore the roses from your hair
 placed
 soft and lovely
 perfectly arranged

You flitted around the room the evening
 long and answered my every desire yet
 then I found myself
 lying face down in my vomit in a darkened
 room
 as your statues
 cried out

Then I watched you collapse on the bed
 with your caged stones and matted newspapers
 that would have been your diary
 had I been able to read you and understand
 that
 what you needed
 I had

ANCIENT FLOWERS

now that you have clipped the wings of your saints
that were made in the old church
and your rosary is your
carnaby
street beads now
and now that your prayers are just
lip-stick on the old nuns
that were concerned
the water is becoming less holy,
robes
changing colors
and the altar is but a counter for
breaking the rules and
drinking
the booze
with the hands that picked
the ancient
flowers

and so now it's all over now, you've unpaved the
stained glass vision
the house a top the hill is boarded shut the
statues claim
they can't save you anymore
your dashboards are empty and
keychains
neglected
you run to your bedroom for shelter
and in the clutter of your
bible
you find a crushed rose that
reminds you
to save something

nuns sing songs in the schoolhouse
empty from the touch of small minds
her ruler
collects the dust
the callouses on her knees are going away
time to pray

for the new church
and the ancient fools

AND THE FISHERMAN KNEW

He sat with the mornings dock with fog around him
with no woodlands to his back
with no ocean horizon for him to dream of ships to come
just a wet board for his seat and reflection of his feet
eaten by that calm night of the air.

A line into the world down there
the kind of hand with the twenty four hour smile
ripping out livers as you say how nice it has been.
This kind of welcome, this kind of bringing you to my world
in friendship let us share the powder of poison
in natural union let me give you the clap.

This kind of mistress wine
with the deep settling hook

Yes, he sat there

and it was as though he knew fish

began and ended and even as it was once again gone into the water
its deserted form with eyes pale and discolored never washed up even
on an untraveled shore or never just ended up in the middle of nowhere
as some easy supper for a seagull or surface searching shark
and he felt so knowing of that hopeless heart

that what he was doing with this string and hook and clam
seemed to be fair battle

for he was ready to be pulled in

and ready to be eaten, that the new system he supplied
may have gotten on to less basic and needy ways to spend the day.

But he smiled

and he saw his reflection as the sun was clearing the air
like children pigeons in the park and he smiled into that
tinted mirror

and that picture exploded as he caught on to
something

holes at the ends of each finger
portals from night into the oceans of feeling.
joining. bodies acting out love. like clay.
water clay and oil clay. hopelessly meshed yet
separable. one instant of reason
defied. some untouchable point. your sudden gushing
rushing through my membranes
a moment kept slipping between the cracks
as we chased it into the rooms of succession
where we finally fell
exhausted sweating in the dust
like an abandoned child chasing what left him behind
and that took to the air.

All the tracks are unreal. And clocks
eat children and sag tits. Tell me what did it do to you
Ah, but you're asleep. Perfect lover.

DEAD ONE

by Don Poultry

When I was five Albert Darby moved in next door to my father's house with his wife and four children. Since his youngest daughter was the same age as I was we started school together the following year.

Al was a very friendly and outgoing type of guy. I'll never forget that broad, easy smile of his. I can remember lying on the grass behind his rose bushes and listening to him swapping stories with my father and the other men in the neighborhood. While bees bumped around from one red rose to another I could hear tales of war in the Pacific or some bordello near Paris. As the sun settled on the horizon columns of light would penetrate through the intertwined rose branches. My father and the other men would leave to get ready for supper. I could look up through the prickly rose bushes and see Al standing there alone, half leaning on his rake. He was very thin and well over six feet tall. I used to wonder if his feet were really big enough to wear size thirteen shoes. He was still smiling as if he was thinking over some joke he had heard. His fingernails were always outlined in black where dirt from the factory where he worked had imbedded itself under them.

When I was eleven Al was promoted to factory foreman. With the increase in salary he was able to buy a new house in Setonville which was closer to the factory. Al took his new position very seriously and usually had to work about twelve hours a day. He was grateful for his job and never complained about the long hours or the hard work.

At eighteen I graduated from high school and went away to college the following September. Last summer when I went home I got a job pumping gas. One day when I got home from work my mother was sitting in the kitchen crying. When I asked her what was wrong she told me that Al's wife had just called. Al had fallen off of a storage tank at work and had broken his back.

Since I didn't have a dark suit, I wore my navy blue sport jacket and black slacks to the wake. As I entered the funeral home Al's coffin was on my right with a woman kneeling in front of it. She got up and walked across the room to where Al's family was waiting to be consoled. I approached the coffin which was resting on a slightly raised platform. On either end of the platform and behind it there were several large floral arrangements. They were mainly composed of curling white lilies and fluffy, pale yellow chrysanthemums with green sashes indicating who had been grief-stricken enough to pay thirty dollars apiece for them. There was a small white vase overflowing with dark red roses from my family.

I leaned over the coffin. I felt like I should kneel or cross myself or mutter something religious to show my reverence for this solemn occasion. I couldn't decide which would be most appropriate so I just looked at the corpse. My first impression was that I was in the wrong

place. No, it was Al alright. He looked so different. He was wearing a new black suit and a white silk shirt. Al wouldn't have been caught dead in a silk shirt. His tie clasp was studded with small white stones which glittered even in the dim light from the candles. Sequins, I guessed. Every hair on his head was slicked back in place. His face was shiny and had the rosy glow of good health. His arms crossed each other on the middle of his chest. His hands were as clean as new bed sheets and his fingernails had been recently manicured. Al wasn't smiling.

A woman who had been looking over my shoulder said. "My, doesn't he look nice." I had to admit that he did. In fact Al looked better than I had ever seen him before. He looked so good that he might have been someone else. I went to express my grief to his family carefully avoiding any direct mention of the corpse, for fear of embarrassment.

On the day of the funeral my mother asked me if I was going to go. I told her that I had to work. I spent the day at a baseball game. Al used to like going to the game whenever he could.

The night after the funeral I was looking through a stack of old Life magazines. The first one was about the funeral of the late President Kennedy. What a grand affair that had been. The next one was about the funeral of his brother, Robert. There were more issues which were devoted to pictorial tributes of other great men who had had the misfortune to die. Martin Luther King, General Douglas MacArthur, Charles DeGaulle, Winston Churchill, and so on. The last magazine has a picture of a mummified corpse on the cover flanked by two young men. The man on the left was tall and heavy. He wore his hair long and had a massive beard. The man on the right was smaller and was clean shaven. As I flipped through the magazine I learned that these two men were attempting to save the body of their deceased comrade to protest the outrageous overpricing of the funeral business.

Suddenly I found myself in the same room with the two men in the magazine. They were carrying the empty shell of their dead friend. The tall one was attempting to straighten out the arms of the corpse.

"Godammit!" said the short man, "He's too stiff. I can't bend his goddam arm. Where should we put him?" he asked.

"How about the living room?" answered the tall man. "He used to like sittin' in that big chair by the window. Wish we could straighten out his goddam arm. He'd look better that way."

I followed them as they carried the Dead One into the living room. They placed him in a large overstuffed chair next to a small window.

"Sit him up straighter," the short man said.

The tall man readjusted the position of the Dead One. "Maybe we could buy some plastic flowers to put on the table next to him," he said.

"He's not smilin'," the short man said.

"What?"

"I said he's not smilin', He was always smilin'."

"For crissakes, if I can't bend his arm how in hell am I gonna make him smile."

"He won't look right if we can't get him to smile like he always did."

"Okay, Okay, put a goddam smile on his face!" the tall man snapped.

"Maybe if I cut the muscles holding his jaw in place we can make him smile," the short man said. He produced a knife from his pocket and clicked it open. He leaned over the Dead One and started cutting the dry flesh. As he made quick sawing motions with the small blade, black fluid oozed from the open wounds and dribbled down the front of the Dead One. He was so involved with his work that he paid no attention to the escaping liquid. Suddenly the tall man grabbed the Dead One by the hair and lifted the rotten head off the stump that was a neck. "That didn't work," he said as he surveyed the head. "He still isn't smilin'."

The short man took the stinking head and did some more cutting. He held the head at arm's length to inspect his handiwork.

"Nope, I guess we'll have to try another way," he said. He handed the disfigured head to me.

There was very little left of the Dead One's face. I noticed that the top of his head had now been cut off. At the height of the middle of his forehead there was an edge of jagged bone and flesh which extended completely around the skull. I looked inside. His brain was gone. There were patches of white glistening bone and small rivulets of the dark stinking fluid. I dropped the head which thudded onto the floor. My vision was becoming hazy and my senses had grown numb. As I started to vomit, my knees gave out and I sank to the floor. I tried desperately to lift my head away from the stench of my own vomit. Slowly my eyes focused on the face of the Dead One only inches away.

He still wasn't smiling.

3 A. M. RIVER STREET CAFE

Too strong, cold, cafe coffee
Forms sticky brown rings
On formica table tops.
While this night's city
Grave-yard shift, tired workers
Discuss last weeks conquests,
Center fold, stapled, virgins.
'Old Joe', an under-worked,
Over-paid, bar grill operator
Flashes a greasy grin
As he tells the one about
The Pope and the traveling sales lady.
Cheap tin, reconverted tinsel, ash trays
Hold three-point-two cigarette butts
Before overflowing into your lap.
A loud, buzzing, neon sign
Blandly blinks, "Budweiser Beer on tap here."
Stop and go, red and green, traffic lights
Create Christmas color patterns
On empty rain slick streets.
As an old, tired, street walker,
Teeny-bopper, bubble-gum queen,
With mascara running over her face
In acne spiked track shoes,
Parades in and orders the usual.
A blind drunk queer
Approaches a red necked cop
With an interesting proposition.
A salavation army, (hallelujah) hand-out
Is asking the damned, "Where will you spend eternity?"
"With a bottle of wine and a good whore
At the River Street Cafe."
Is the penciled response.

TWO BLOCKS WEST OF THE CASTLE

In the end, the night is no more than a lady come seeking her due.
In the chambers of fading pleasure
Death's soft brush paints the nude.
Mid-night sunrise colors.
Amber black wedding rings clash
On satin battle-fields.
Beauty is lost to the victor's fancy.
Rusting bed springs respond
To a one way conservation of desire.
The hermits love-making is filtered through
Old yellow lace, damp with dawn.
Have you ever had it so good my lady-love?
Or is it only I who smiles a toothless grin?
The virgin mistress whispers sex on a crucifixion-curse.
The master stares weakly into the broken mirror
Weeping tears of appropriate doom,
While Sister Anne, down stairs, hangs
From a crystal chandelier.
Suspended by a heirloom rosary
Wrapped in the finest threads of reason.
The minstrel is singing and the jester is laughing.
And the Bibles are burning in the courtyard below.
The blind priest lights altar candles
And whispers, "Glory be to God."
The king is crying. The king is dying. The king is dead.
Two blocks west of the castle.

NEW YORK CITY

neon lights incessantly blinking
their heat waves attack me
teaming August night
hot cement slabs, black gratings
subway screams by below
high heels and miniskirts
rippling thighs and undulating hips
mentally raping them
movie marquis verbalizing inner desires
people people people
red, black, white and shades in between
catholic priest, black muslim
Jackie Onasis, Rico Ratzo
heat bouncing off the buildings
Trapped.
catching you on the rebound
snag a cab
give me a tip you cheap bastard
port authority
throngs of people going in circles
goddam endless ticket lines
man in front with placard
repent your sins, live for tomorrow
faggot in back
how about good time today.
whore struts sensuously
ten and five, no jive
but imagination is free
shirt sticks to back
socks keep falling to ankles
hands are clammy
snatches of conservation
habla espanol
dumb nigger
white bastard
right jew
suitcase weighs a ton
shifting from hand to hand.
eyes watering
nerves are shot, involuntary twitches
bus ten minutes late
damn bus.
High first step
suitcase turned wrong way-won't fit
goddamn suitcase
empty seat next to fat lady
give to united fund, secure future join army, sunny Florida
too much, close eyes
loosen tie and exhale,
and enter
Westport.

LOST

Sunrays descend
Stop.
Contemplate
Forever lost,
raped by ghetto's breath
Tough little black boy
underneath
cries.
Old bricks trap echo
Black boy
Unheard.
Jagged glass/steel blades
pleading call
muffled.
Sun looks earthward
Ghetto fog conceals,
Little black boy
City's child.

WAITING FOR A BUS ON A WINTER DAY

A dark greasy puddle
 stagnant
refuses to mirror
life's images,
A thirsty dog turns his head away
I gaze intently
the dark greasy puddle
reflects, me
unpure rain drops
caught
nowhere to go but
oblivion.

White snow
starts falling
buoyed by good intentions
the dark greasy puddle waits
unmoved.

ASPIRATIONS

floating past my eyes
like Autumn leaves, responding
to November winds
ecstasy in weightlessness
released from their fetters
fated
to kiss the soil
and be absorbed.
embraced, by
crushing snow.
yet hoping
to glimpse returning birds
that dance
upon captured raindrops
of a Spring rain.





COMMUNION ON ALLEN STREET
(for g. d.)

by Dean Tucker

A Saturday evening trek up dating-bar lined Second Avenue gave birth to Stan Hardy's Sunday morning mental cobwebs. He had not gone out to get drunk. He wanted a woman to sleep with. He liked being with someone in the morning. He had bought many drinks for several girls, but his luck as a Lothario was poor. He spent the night with himself.

Stan did not like to eat alone. He hated to cook. His hangover quickly convinced him to eat breakfast at a West 12th Street bar and restaurant, the Ninth Circle. The eatery served a "drinkers special" breakfast from morning until mid-afternoon. He showered, shaved, dressed and left his fourth floor apartment via elevator.

The sun slapped him in the face, sending a warmth to his feet. He viewed the other Sunday morning walkers with a physicist's eye, the spectrum personified by women of varying builds in yellow, green, blue, and white; men in seersucker, glen plaid, tattersol; each with racing stripe tie, bright and bib like.

Stan realized it was Sunday. He knew it all along, the smiling faces of church bound families made him explicitly aware of the day. He no longer went to church but as a teenager he had served Mass every Sunday. Once he even dreamed of becoming a priest, an earthly representative of Christ. He did not think he could do that now. He wasn't sure if there was a Christ. He was sure that churches made people happy, at least it brought them together.

The Ninth Circle was uncrowded. Eddy, a waiter familiar to Stan, was working. "Happy Easter Stan, do you want breakfast?" Stan was surprised with the greeting. He pondered the insincerity of Eddy's voice and returned the greeting with equal enthusiasm.

"I'll have eggs sunny, sausage, bagel with cream cheese and coffee . . . but first a Bloody Mary." Stan needed the drink. He drank it in gulps while smoking a cigarette and thinking of what a festive day Easter was during his childhood. His mind worked as if an entity in itself. A distinct voice audibly questioned him "remember the jelly beans and egg hunts?" The Fauntleroy and saddle shoes, confession and communion; How about the big ham dinner prepared by Mama Tosci and all the aunts and cousins, and all the wine the uncles drank? The day was fun, but it has to be spent with someone." He thought about a date for dinner. The mental mouth changed its tone. "How can you spend a day meant for happiness alone?" This is Easter, Resurrection Day, spring is here."

He was compelled to get a date; if he spent the day alone it would depress him heavily. He ate quickly and left a big tip. Then walked home, smiling at the happy faces of church going families, but he was thinking of who he wanted to share his happiness with.

Like every wise New York bachelor, Stan had his little black book. Because he was eager to share his happiness, the names he read received the same analysis and critique a gem buyer gave his diamonds. He thought: "Susan Scott . . . no. Linda Jacobson . . . No.

Candy DeCrosi . . . no. Toni Angelica . . . yes." He dialed the number. The phone rang three or four times before being answered by a male voice.

"Is Toni there please?"

"Yeah, hang on, I'll get her." Two minutes passed before Toni's familiar voice came through the wire.

"Hello" she said.

"Happy Easter" Stan shot back making no effort to conceal his excitement, "This is Stan, how've you been?"

"Fine Stan, and yourself."

"Pretty good, work is going well, I'm alive socially, I'm not broke. I'm doin' OK. What are you doing today?"

Slight hesitation. "My fiance is here and we're going out for dinner in about five minutes."

"Shit," Stans insides yelled, engaged. He didn't know she was that involved. He saw her about a month ago and nothing about serious relationships was said. "When did you get engaged Toni?" asked Stan, hiding his unhappiness by speaking quickly.

"Last night, are you happy for me Stan? I feel so good."

"Yeah Toni, I'm happy for you. I'll hang up so you can leave for dinner." "Good-bye." And then one second later "Happy Easter" but it was never heard, the phone had clicked itself dead.

A few minutes of silent staring out the window killed Stan's initial surprise from the telephone conversation. He had lost touch with Toni and lost her completely. With resignation he mixed a stiff Bloody Mary and looked through his address book a second time. A small desperation was in his voice as he read to himself, Annie McDuff . . . no. Sylvia Horowitz . . . no. (On Easter?) Carol Brantley . . . Yes. Stan dialed the number. The Easter parade had begun on nearby Fifth Avenue. The phone rang. He could hear the music as it drifted through the stone canyon that separated him from the famous street. "In your Easter bonnet, with all the frills upon it, you'll be the fairest lady in the Easter Parade." The phone had rung eight or ten times. Disgustedly Stan whacked the receiver down. He picked up the address book and thumbed through the remaining pages. None of the names had any appeal. The two disappointments had destroyed his earlier zeal. With an angry flick of the wrist the black book sailed across the room to an opposite wall fluttering to the floor like a shot crow. He lit a cigarette and puffed vigorously; the smoke clouds counterbalancing his meditations. He wanted to share whatever happiness he had with someone. Perhaps someone else was lonely too and he could make their day happier. But who? Stan's perplexity drove him to the bar in his den. He had three Papa Dobles. He became dirty drunk, but not unaware of his basic desire. He decided to keep drinking. He decided against watching the parade; there would be no intimacy in that.

The sky had become grey. Some of the darkness leaked into the room, deepening the shade of blue on the walls. Stan didn't know where to go. The bars regularly patronized were closed today. They were respectable enough to observe the holiday. Where to go? What to do? With whom? How? Absent mindedly he took a piece of paper from his desk and wrote with hurried hand:

sadness drifting like a cold snow
 mental impasse, thoughts blocked
 rationality must be hurdled
 to the never never land of
 of . . . of . . . of . . . green thoughts.

What trash he thought. Writing poetry was not the answer to his loneliness, but the phrase never-never land repeated itself inside his mind. Where is never-never land?" he thought. "Somewhere over the rainbow?" Left at big rock candy mountain past Sasparilla stream?"

"What a dink I am" Stan said out loud. The alcohol now had marked affect on his behaviour. "Eight and a half million people in this city and I'm lonely."

The words put him in motion. He grabbed a trench coat, threw it on, picked up a bottle of Schloss Johannesburg from his wine rack, stuffed it in his pocket and walked to the kitchen. He opened a cabinet, looking for portable food. The first thing that he saw was a box of vanilla wafers. Into his other pocket they went. He left the house, forgetting to lock the door. Two minutes and he was in the street, buttoning his coat to the new cold. He headed for First Avenue but had no particular destination.

Stan was staggering slightly by the time he reached Fifth Avenue. He waited for a break in the parade and crossed the street. His thoughts were a brew of pity and cynicism. He felt sorry for the people who thought God would like them to worship the Resurrection of Christ by listening to John Philip Sousa's military songs played by marching bands. "God looks favorably on the military, I bet Jesus Christ is hiding inside a tuba" his mind slandered. Up 14th Street he walked, each step making him drunker.

First Avenue at last. He turned south heading downtown. The streets were empty save a few late churchgoers. It was well past noon now. He had never been to the Lower East Side, but today he would see the infamous neighborhood. His city was the mid-town Manhattan of affluence. Maybe someone was downtown to share the day with. Stan staggered on, stopping once at a dark hole in the wall to have another drink, this time straight bourbon with beer. He didn't finish the beer.

The blocks on lower First Avenue are very short, some less than two hundred feet long. Stan soon found himself at Allen Street which runs perpendicular to First Avenue. He turned right and headed west in terms of the city's geography. Several men were

standing in a small triangular park 100 feet away, warming themselves by a fire that burned inside an empty discarded oil drum. The park was bounded by a fence of black spears. The men stared at him intensely. He glanced quickly in their direction, but they failed to notice his observation.

"What're they looking at" he asked himself, walking a little fast, motivated by fear. He couldn't imagine. To escape the feeling of their scrutiny Stan turned left at the first street. The signpost was covered with political stickers that had faded to an off white. He had to urinate.

Stan was surprised to see his reflection in a deserted store window. He realized the men in the park had been staring at his clothes. He was out of character with the neighborhood. He tried the door of the store. It was unlocked. He stepped inside, closed the door, unbuttoned his coat and unzipped his fly. The room was full of yellowed newspapers and empty wine pints. He expected a voice to say "nobody here but us rats." He relieved himself. He was very drunk. He decided to talk with the men in the park. He emptied his trench coat pockets and took it off, putting the wine and wafers into his sport coat pocket. He scuffed his shoes on one another, scratching the brown leather to dullness. He rolled his left sock down, exposing the ankle. His pants were too clean. He prostrated and crawled for a while covering himself with dust. He dirtied his hands and rubbed his face with them. He took off his tie and threw it with the trench coat, then popped a button off his shirt by yanking each side. Stan became crazily carried away by this game. He picked up an empty wine bottle and smashed it on another. He cut his right pants leg generously, laughing as he did, then he stopped. He was ready to meet the winos. He examined his new look in the window when he got outside. He disheveled his hair and said loudly "What a perfect pig I am, pigasus perfectus, ha!" He felt slightly insane.

Stan's mind switched to a serious wave. He was still afraid of the men. What if they recognized him? He hoped they were blurry-eyed enough not to. What if they were a band of robbers? His hand touched his wallet. It held over two hundred dollars. He approached the group. No one spoke.

Stan didn't know what to do. He counted the bums. Twelve. He wanted to speak but didn't know what to say. He took his wine bottle out and slugged at it. It dulled him more. The men all looked the same to him. Each had his own ungodly filth and vestiges of poverty, second hand and threadbare, some without socks, others with no shoelaces, but packing cord instead. They were all different but he saw them as if through an out of focus camera.

He mustered his courage slowly, sips of wine augmenting the basic desire he had to communicate. The man next to Stan was staring at him. He was gray and unshaven. A piece of dried mucus hung from a nostril. His lips were chapped, his face wrinkled like pizza cheese. His eyes were red and a glaze was over them. Stan felt very

sad. He couldn't believe his eyes. He blinked and rubbed them. A tear fell. His mind asked in frustration "Can you goddamn believe that, what is wrong with this guy, how could he get like that?"

A piece of wood clattered into the oil drum. Stan started and spoke to the men that had been staring. "Happy Easter."

"Today Easter?" came a slurred and hesitant reply.

Not too surprised at the man's ignorance Stan said, "Yes, it is, it's Easter Sunday. Happy Easter." He drank so he wouldn't have to speak. He slobbered some wine on his chin, then wiped it with his coat sleeve.

The derelict spoke. "Jeesus Chris, Easter Sunay, huh, Jeesus Chris, that sumthin" forgot all 'bout it." Then turning to the others, Jeesus Chris, ya know today's Easter, this fella here jus' tol' me, today's Easter, Jeesus Chris can ya b'lieve it?"

A few grunts and uplifted eyes answered the question. One wino said "who cares?" No one was interested at all except the man nearest Stan.

"Jeesus Chris, gimme a little sip of yer wine. Jeesus Chris."

Stan gave him the bottle. He drank with slow, long sips, tilting the bottle gently to his lips. He lowered the bottle, smiled a broad grin exposing one black tooth and said "Jeesus Chris, thank ya, Jeesus Chris' Easter, huh. He smiled sheepishly after speaking, then gazed at nothing in particular. He was mesmerized.

Stan was drunk enough to have his mind slowed to a one-thing-at-a-time pace. His attention became trapped by the nearly inhuman specimen before him. He realized that giving the man wine was giving him the one last thing he had to believe in. The man had come alive with the liquid in his stomach. He had a rebirth, even if temporary.

"Sure take the rest, here you can have these cookies too." Stan handed him the wafers. He ate them one by one, sipping the wine after each wafer.

"Jeesus Chris, thanks, Easter Sunay huh? Jeesus Chris" I forgot all 'bout it, what can I do to thank ya? I gotta quarter, take it. We'll have a deal. Yer the nices' guy I ever knew, Jesus Chris' take it."

Stan was without words for two minutes. Depression stabbed him with horrible sharpness. He tried to speak, but the sight of the man staring at him, quarter in hand immobilized his tongue. A few mumbles came first and finally, "No, keep your quarter, we don't need to make a deal.

A tear fell. Stan couldn't stay any longer. He turned and walked away from the man who began to shout "You made me happy, Jeesus Chris' you made me happy, take the quarter."

Stan walked quickly. He was crying like a lost toddler. He couldn't speak. His mind swirled and dipped within his skull. His stomach somersaulted. He heard the ever present voice in his mind shout "you can't make deals with Jesus Christ."

